

IS THERE A SUICIDE DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE? A PRANK CALL TO JACK KEVORKIAN

Jack Kevorkian is the star of Bethlehem in a shimmering galaxy of self-imposed death. He's your ship's pilot on the shuttle to nowhere, a grim ferryman who has steered sixteen people beyond the pale. If you're terminally ill, there's only one way to go—just buckle your seat belt, close your eyes, and fly Air Kevorkian. The takeoff may be rocky, but the landing's always smooth.

Even that creepy Armenian name—*Kevorkian*—hints at knotted bones and jaundiced skin. Nature has bestowed upon the cadaverous Dr. K. a gaunt face and haunted eyes befitting the Grim Reaper. No death—either slow and ghastly or quick and brutal—could be more frightening than that emaciated mug staring down at you for all eternity.

But Kevorkian is nothing if not ferociously sincere when he states that euthanasia is the “last civil right,” likening himself to such liberty-seekers as Nelson Mandela and Henry David Thoreau. He is no doubt a regular Joe—someone who likes cheese sandwiches, Sylvester the Cat, and an honest round of poker—but in his zealous railing against the medical industry and a government that criminalizes assisted suicide, he has assumed a near-mythic status. A hundred years from now, Kevorkian's legacy will be the stuff of legend. Whether he is viewed as Jesus Christ or Don Quixote will be for history to decide.

Seeking to muscle in on a piece of that history, *ANSWER Me!* thought that it would be fun to phone Dr. Death at his Michigan headquarters and try to negotiate our lovely assistant editor's suicide. In December, 1990, Debbie was diagnosed with an ovarian cyst. It has since dissolved, but we decided to give her suicide a trial run, anyway. At my prodding, she placed the call on the morning of February 19, 1993, a day after Kevorkian performed his fourteenth and fifteenth assisted suicides. With six corpses notched since February 4, the Kevorkian death train was going full-steam. Up until that time, he had successfully slalomed around Michigan's nebulous suicide laws. The statute he cites as taking effect on April 1 makes assisted suicide a felony in Michigan, punishable by up to four years' imprisonment. But Michigan officials, perhaps freaked by Kevorkian's feverish pace, moved the law up to take effect on February 26, only a week after our call. Jack has vowed to take his civil disobedience all the way to the jailhouse, where he has promised to starve himself to death. We hope he doesn't, because he benefits mankind more than his persecutors ever will. We look up to Jack Kevorkian. In our book, he's the coolest of the cool cats. We wish he was our father.

Is this Doctor Kevorkian?

Yes.

Hi. My name is Debbie Goad, and about three weeks ago I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

Uh-huh.

I have an inoperable tumor in my ovaries.

Where are you calling from?

I'm in Hollywood.

California?

Yeah. My mother passed away in 1980 of ovarian cancer and, you know, she died a really painful death. She went for chemotherapy. Umm, I had to clean up the vomit, it made her so sick. She died an agonizingly brutal death, and I've just been in so much pain. It hurts me like a monster.

You know, the difficulty is [that] there's no place to do it here. You can't do it. I can't help you in California, and here in Michigan we have to have a private home. It can't be done in a rented place.

Oh. Yesterday they said something on the news about a couple in California.

Yeah, but that was in a private home here.

A private home. What do you mean?

They had access to a private home here in Michigan. You've got to have access to a private home. Do you have family, friends, or relatives in Michigan?

I'll come to see you.

I know.

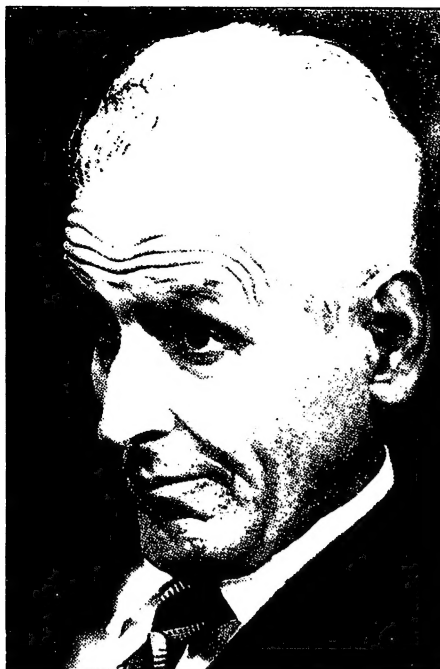
I'll fly out.

But where's the house we're going to use?

I do have a girlfriend in Michigan.

Where? What city?





There is someone in Detroit.

Well, make arrangements with that friend. Then maybe we can continue and see if we can help you. But we first have to have a place to do it here.

Well, I'll contact her later. I was just wondering—does it hurt? Is there a waiting list?

Well, I can't talk about details. I don't talk about details on the phone.

I have a shotgun right here, and I have ammunition. [Pumps our Mossberg twelve-

gauge] Do you hear that?

We have to wait and see. See, the law in Michigan takes effect April first. We have until April first.

I know, but you look like such a gentle man on TV.

Until they move the law—if they move the law up like they're threatening to do, then we don't have time to help you. They'll move the law up to next week. If they don't, then we have time through April first, so if you don't hear about the law in Michigan being moved up to make it illegal, then check with your friend in Detroit to see if you can use the home.

See, I have a shotgun right here. Do you hear this? [Pumps the Mossberg again]

I can't give advice on that.

And I don't want to use it because it's messy, and my husband, he's the only family I have.

What does he say about what you want to do?

Oh, he'll do it, too. I'm thirty-nine years old, I don't have children, I have no obligations. I quit my job. I need just to speak to you if I could.

Well, here's what you have to do first. You've got to put it in writing, what you want in a brief letter.

To you?

I'll give you an address.

Send it to you?

Yeah. Put it in writing what you want. What your problem is.

Uh-huh.

Then if you've got any medical records with you at all, I want to have a doctor's letter or a hospital discharge summary signed by a doctor to verify your medical condition.

Sure. You'll get that.

You send those in the mail



to...[gives address].

I will. Umm, how much does the whole procedure cost?

There's no charge.

And how long does the whole process take?

Well, I won't discuss details until we're sure we might be able to help you. We're not even sure you have a place in Michigan.

Well, I'll contact my girlfriend. Under the circumstances—

—You have to get her permission. You've got to tell her what you want now, and she's got to say OK.

See, my tumor's the size of a kiwi, and I wish I could just reach in and pull it out.

I know what you mean. I know you've been suffering. I know you are. I know.

I've been drinking like a fish. I've been taking, you know, aspirins.

I understand that. Like I said, I can't help you unless there's a place here in Michigan you can use.

I think I'll be able to get it. I really want to meet up with you, doctor.

Then send me the things to the address I gave you. Send me your letter and the doctor's verification of your condition.



Once we get that, which I know I can get within a few days, [do] you think the whole thing will work?

We'll see. If they don't move the law up, yeah. Because we can't help you after April first.

I definitely qualify, though?

[Clears throat] If you've got the cancer you say you have.

Yes, oh, yes.

If you're near the end, yes.

Doctor, will you hold my hand? Will you be with me?

You've got to come with somebody. You can't come here alone. Your husband should come.

He will. Will you be watching while—

—Oh, yes. We'll be there all the time.

Is it normal to be scared?

Sure, sure. Don't worry about those things.

What happens to my body?

We'll discuss all that later. If your friend can't

help you, there's no sense even talking about it.

I think she will.

Well, only then will we go on with further discussion. If your friend can help you and you send me the material, then we'll talk about it, OK?

I'm just so scared.

Well, don't be scared.

It's such a relief just to talk to you.

Well, don't be frightened. There's time. You've got plenty of time. Don't panic. [To] panic is the worst thing you can do. Don't panic. You got a lot of time. If you get your friend to help you, then get the letters to me in the mail, the copy of the doctor's report, and your letter, and then I'll get back to you after I discuss it with my colleagues here.

Well, what do you think I should do today? I can't sleep. I can't eat.

You've got to start doing these things if you want to go on, and I'm telling you if they don't move the law up, and they probably won't, we

have until April first, and that's it.

What happens after April first?

It's illegal in Michigan. I go to jail.

Are you going to jail?

After April first, I will.

They're going to send you? You're such a sweet man! Sweet, gentle man.

If I did this after April first, I'd go to jail. So we have until April first.

But after April first, if you stop, are they gonna send you to jail?

No. If I do it *after* April first.

Are you gonna do it after April first?

Please, let's not discuss this further. Do what I said and get the material to me, OK?

I sure will. I'm just also concerned about you.

Forget me. Be concerned about yourself. Don't worry about me, OK?

OK. Thank you.

OK. Bye-bye. ■

